EAST AFRICA CUP 2026

Comprehensive Event Report

"A Week in Moshi, A Year in the Community"

24 – 28 June 2026 · Moshi, Kilimanjaro, Tanzania
24th edition of the East Africa Cup
Prepared by the East Africa Cup Secretariat

Excitement shown as Ayiera Initiatives team leap together before the East Africa Cup.

Contents

1. Introduction 3
2. The Event at a Glance 4
3. Objectives 4
4. Event Highlights 5
4.1 Football Competition 5
4.2 Chess Competition 5
4.3 Community Coaching: The EACCES Programme 6
4.4 Community Education Sessions 8
4.5 Cultural Evenings 9
5. Confronting Age Cheating: A Two-Pronged Response 9
5.1 Digital Registration and Verification 9
5.2 Grassroots Reform Through Community Coaching 10
6. Looking Ahead: Linking EAC to AFCON 2027 10
7. Participant Feedback and Reception 10
8. Challenges Faced 11
9. Recommendations 11
10. Conclusion 12

1. Introduction

This report presents a summary of the activities, outcomes and forward commitments of the East Africa Cup (EAC) 2026, held from 24 to 28 June 2026 in Moshi, at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro in northern Tanzania. Now in its 24th year, the East Africa Cup remains a flagship regional initiative that uses sport as a tool for youth empowerment, community development and social transformation.

True to its long-standing slogan, “A Week in Moshi, A Year in the Community”, EAC is a multi-sport gathering built around participation rather than competition alone. The 2026 edition brought together eighteen football teams from Tanzania and Kenya and sixty registered chess players, supported by a large volunteer corps and delivered alongside a programme of community education, cultural exchange and coach development. Grassroots Sports for Development Organisations, development partners and technical experts once again combined their efforts to deliver a holistic experience for the young people at the centre of the event.

The 2026 edition carried a particular sense of purpose. In the recent past, the event confronted serious integrity failures at youth level — most visibly the age-cheating and unsporting conduct that marred the Under-13 category in 2025 and led to disqualifications and sanctions. EAC 2026 was designed as a direct, constructive response to those failures, advancing two connected reforms: a **new digital registration system** to tighten the integrity of who takes part, and a strengthened **community-coaching programme** to address the root of the problem at the grassroots, among the adults who shape young players. Together these mark a shift from managing symptoms at the tournament to building honesty, safeguarding and care into the game itself.

Joy and teamwork on display as players celebrate a goal.

2. The Event at a Glance

Dates	24 – 28 June 2026
Host venue	Moshi, Kilimanjaro Region, Tanzania
Football teams	18 (Tanzania and Kenya)
Chess players	60 children, in two categories (5–9 and 14–18 years)
Community-coaching participants	≈ 40 per session (established and aspiring coaches)
Community-education themes	7 thematic areas, led by 10 facilitators
Volunteer corps	8 referees · 8 field managers · 4 first aiders · 8 media volunteers · 10 facilitators

3. Objectives

EAC 2026 pursued the following objectives:

1. To promote positive youth development through sport, chess and life-skills education.
2. To confront age misrepresentation on two fronts — tightening registration and verification, while addressing its roots through grassroots coach development.
3. To equip community coaches in safeguarding, inclusion, life-skills mentorship and honest practice through the East Africa Community Coach Education System (EACCES).
4. To facilitate cultural exchange and collaboration across East African communities.
5. To strengthen partnerships among Sports for Development Organisations and technical partners, including UNESCO.
6. To establish a lasting coaching pathway that continues beyond the tournament and connects to the 2027 Africa Cup of Nations hosted by Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda.

4. Event Highlights

4.1 Football Competition

Eighteen teams from Tanzania and Kenya competed across the age categories in an atmosphere of excitement and camaraderie. Matches were supported by a dedicated volunteer corps — eight referees, eight field managers and four first aiders — with eight media volunteers documenting the week. Building on the hard lessons of 2025, this year's competition placed integrity at its centre: registration and age verification were managed through a new digital system (see Section 5), and the standard of conduct on and off the pitch reflected the region's renewed commitment to fair play.

An Under-13 team receives final guidance from their coach ahead of competition.

4.2 Chess Competition

Chess continued to affirm EAC's identity as a multi-sport gathering. Sixty children registered to compete, organised into two age categories — 5 to 9 years and 14 to 18 years — broadening participation to younger children and to those whose talents lie beyond the football pitch. Beyond the board, chess served as a vehicle for concentration, strategic thinking, patience and life skills, reinforcing the same developmental values that run through the wider programme and widening the circle of children the Cup reaches.

Chess competition involved 60 participants

4.3 Community Coaching: The EACCES Programme

The centrepiece of EAC 2026 was a dedicated community-coaching programme, delivered over three days, in which participants worked through **Level One of the East Africa Community Coach Education System (EACCES)** — the entry point of the community-coaching framework and the level at which every coach begins. The programme treats coaching as a matter of safeguarding, honesty and care rather than tactics alone, investing in the adults who most directly shape how children experience the game. Delivery of the programme — and of the wider 2026 edition — was supported in part by **UNESCO**, whose financial contribution towards the event's broader costs, together with its ongoing advisory and technical guidance on safeguarding and programme design, helped make this year's community-coaching work and other aspects of the event possible.

Level One introduces the community-coach pathway and, at its centre, the six capability areas every coach is expected to demonstrate:

Capability	What every coach is expected to demonstrate
Safe environments	Creating safe and positive learning environments
Reflective practice	Reflecting, planning and evaluating coaching
Life skills	Developing life skills and leadership
Physical literacy	Improving physical literacy, health and fitness
Quality sport	Leading quality sport
Community development	Mobilising resources for community development

Level One matters because it is where every community coach starts, whatever their background. Its emphasis falls on child safeguarding, life skills, community mobilisation and basic coaching rather than advanced tactics. Sessions drew an average of forty participants — established team coaches learning side by side with sixteen-year-olds who aspire to coach — working from a shared foundation of protecting children and building character. By grounding every coach in safe, inclusive and honest practice from their first level of training, the programme sets the standard on which each higher level is then built.

Coaches and young players during a session at the East Africa Cup 2026, Moshi.

From the tournament into the community: the six-month practical period

The work does not end when the fixtures do. From August 2026, every trained coach enters the guide's six-month practical period, designed around the reality that coaches are spread across Kenya and Tanzania. Rather than relying on in-person supervision alone, each coach reports monthly on their own community sessions — viewed through the four foundations of Level One: child safeguarding, life skills, community mobilisation and basic coaching — and trainers review these submissions online each month for feedback, questions and shared learning. In this way EACCES strengthens the coaching that participants already do, rather than adding a parallel programme.

Support is organised in three tiers, so that the standard is the same for everyone and only the support along the way differs:

- Coaches near the programme's base in Arusha and Moshi receive **in-person visits** to observe real sessions;
- Coaches further afield are **supported virtually**, with peers confirming that sessions take place;
- All coaches converge for the formal **Observed Engagement Levels assessment**, held in person when they arrive a few days ahead of East Africa Cup 2027.

Together, the monthly record and that assessment decide who progresses toward Level 2 — embedding a multi-year pipeline in which one cohort advances as a new cohort enters, compounding the regional coaching network year on year.

In their words

> *I hold a CAF D licence, so I was trained on the technical side of football. But community coaching gave me the fundamentals I was missing. I had been leading a community team with huge gaps — on safeguarding children and on life-skills mentorship — and I now understand that my own conduct as a coach shapes the children under my care.*
>
> **Saad Hamza Ramadhan — Coach, Msimamo Youth Educators (CAF D licence)**

> *Football is developing very fast in our communities, and academies big and small are springing up to train children who pay to take part — which too often overlooks talented children from poor families. Community coaching shifts a coach's perspective: it is not only about skill, or about the children whose parents can afford the fees. It is about opening the game to children from poor backgrounds too, creating an environment that is healthier for the community and for the children themselves.*
>
> **Stephen Minja — Community-coaching facilitator**

4.4 Community Education Sessions

Held concurrently with the community-coaching sessions, a parallel set of themed community-education sessions was run for the young participants from the competing teams. Ten facilitators led these on issues that shape young lives across the region.

Reaching players and coaches at the same time, the sessions gave young people and the adults leading them a shared language for protection, wellbeing and respect — the same values UNESCO champions in and through sport.

Thematic area	Facilitating partner
Stop Poverty Campaign	Y-Global
Transformative Masculinity	Youth Peace Makers
Mental Health	Youth Peace Makers
Gender-Based Violence	Tai Tanzania
Child Safeguarding	CHRISC Tanzania
Culture	MYSA
Menstrual Health & Hygiene	Angaza Development Organization
Interfaith Dialogue	NCA/Interfaith Moshi

Thematic area	Facilitating partner
Project Management and Climate Change	Mind the Gap
Chess and Life skills	Iyanna Foundation
Awareness on Child Safe Guarding	CHRISC Tanzania
Drugs and Substance abuse	Centre for Sports and Growth
Community Coaching	CHRISC Tanzania and CTIDO

Community coaches at work in a group session; safeguarding and life skills at the core.

4.5 Cultural Evenings

Each evening celebrated the diversity of the participating communities through traditional dances, songs and youth talent showcases. Beyond entertainment, these gatherings strengthened relationships across teams and organisations, reinforcing the cultural exchange that has long been part of the East Africa Cup's character.

5. Confronting Age Cheating: A Two-Pronged Response

The most damaging integrity failure of 2025 was age misrepresentation. EAC 2026 responded on two fronts at once — tightening the system that governs who takes part, and reshaping the grassroots culture that allows the problem to arise.

5.1 Digital Registration and Verification

For the first time, registration was handled through a new online application built on the Secretariat's own registration platform. Requiring teams to apply and register players digitally introduced a clearer, more consistent record of participants and made age declarations easier to scrutinise ahead of the event. The system is not yet a complete solution: challenges remain in securing verifiable supporting documentation

from every player, and this will require continued attention. Even so, it represents a meaningful step forward from the paper-based, largely on-the-day checks of previous years, and provides a foundation to build on for future editions.

5.2 Grassroots Reform Through Community Coaching

Tightening registration addresses the symptom; the deeper cause lies at the grassroots. Age cheating persists where coaches and communities tolerate or even encourage it, and no verification system at the tournament gate can fully substitute for honest practice in the clubs and academies where children train week to week. This conviction — that the issue of age must ultimately be handled at grassroots level — is precisely why the community-coaching programme was strengthened this year. By grounding every coach in safeguarding, integrity and care from their very first level of training, and by sustaining that standard through the six-month practical period and beyond, EACCES works to remove the incentive to cheat at its source. The two reforms are therefore complementary: the registration app raises the cost of dishonesty at the event, while community coaching reduces the appetite for it in the community.

6. Looking Ahead: Linking EAC to AFCON 2027

EAC 2026 is best understood as a starting line rather than a finish. The community-coaching commitment deliberately extends past the tournament, through the six-month practical period and into the annual cohort cycle, so that each year one cohort advances a level while a new cohort begins Level One. Over time these compounds into a growing regional network of coaches equipped to protect children and help them lead.

This trajectory converges with a landmark opportunity. In 2027, the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) will be hosted across Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda — the first time the tournament comes to East Africa. In cooperation with UNESCO, the Secretariat intends to use the visibility of AFCON 2027 to highlight the same values the community-coaching programme instils: safeguarding, integrity, inclusion and the development of children as future community leaders.

7. Participant Feedback and Reception

Reception of the 2026 programme was positive. Set against the previous year’s age-cheating concerns, participants welcomed a clear, practical standard for honest and protective coaching, and valued learning that reached beyond the pitch. Coaches in particular reported filling long-standing gaps in safeguarding and life-skills mentorship, while the parallel community-education sessions gave young players and their coaches a shared language for wellbeing and respect.

8. Challenges Faced

1. **Verifiable documentation.** While the new digital registration reduced age-related risks, obtaining reliable supporting documents from every player remained difficult, leaving room for further tightening.
2. **Reach of the practical period.** Supporting coaches spread across Kenya and Tanzania during the six-month period depends on consistent online reporting and reliable connectivity, which vary from place to place.
3. **Documentation and monitoring.** Sustaining momentum between the tournament and the next requires dependable systems for capturing and reviewing coaches' monthly submissions.
4. **Cost of in-person follow-up.** The geographical spread of participating teams across Kenya and Tanzania makes following up with trained coaches in person costly, requiring financial support that is not always readily available. Online reporting helps mitigate this, but in-person observation remains the most effective way to support and assess coaches.

9. Recommendations

1. **Strengthen age verification further.** Build on the registration app by requiring certified documentation and structured pre-event checks, and continue improving the platform's verification features.
2. **Embed coach activity reporting in the registration platform.** Integrate a coach activity-reporting module so that monthly submissions during the practical period are captured in the same system used for team registration.
3. **Sustain the safeguarding partnership with UNESCO.** Continue joint work to align grassroots organisations' structures and policies with global instruments for keeping children and young people safe.
4. **Protect the cohort pipeline.** Preserve the annual model in which one cohort advances as a new cohort enters.
5. **Maintain year-round engagement.** Keep grassroots organisations connected between events through online engagement, feedback and shared learning, so integrity and safeguarding remain live commitments rather than event-week concerns.

10. Conclusion

The East Africa Cup 2026 fostered learning, cultural exchange and youth empowerment across football, chess and a rich programme of community education. More significantly, it turned the hard lessons of 2025 into concrete reform — pairing a new digital registration system with a strengthened, enduring community-coaching programme that addresses age cheating where it truly begins, at the grassroots. With EACCES now extending beyond the tournament and pointing toward AFCON 2027, EAC 2026 is not an endpoint but a starting line: its legacy is a growing network of coaches equipped to protect children, uphold the integrity of the game, and help the next generation lead.

The winners of Under 16 years old girls Crea Kids